

# critical digest

Vol. II No. 8

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The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

Quick Glance At New N.Y. Shows -- digests on inside pages

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Benn Levy's comedy was welcomed as an "amiable farce about sex" by most of the critics. Con votes were filed by Times, World-Telegram, Newark News, Variety and Newsweek. Hawkins, World-Telegram, feared the play was like all the Noel Coward plays he didn't want to see again. Arthur Margetson received top billing in all of the notices. Gibbs, New Yorker, was charmed by the fact that the author could write so much about so thin a plot.

Metropole-Lyceum, 12/8/49. Max Gordon production of William Walden comedy about the New Yorker magazine opened on Tuesday and closed on Wednesday. N.Y. Sun Hi Phillips' quipped that the show set a record for being the first play to open and close in a revolving door. Ten con reviews, one so-so review, and one pro review from the Women's Wear Daily may have been the reason for the swift shutting of the play.

## Shows That Closed

Goodbye, My Fancy-Golden, 11/17/48-12/10/49. Fay Kanin comedy opens in Chicago at the Harris Theatre on December 26 after 13 month run in New York. Ann Harding replaced Madeleine Carroll in the leading role of the play which drew 18 pro reviews at its opening. World-Telegram, Daily Worker, Wall Street Journal, Catholic World, Nation and New Republic panned the show. Atkinson, Times, wrote "despite its virtues of liberalism and good humor, it is an entertaining play".

Browning Version-Coronet, 10/2/49-12/10/49. Terence Rattigan's twin bill starring Maurice Evans and Edna Best closed when theatre party business fell. News, George Jean Nathan, Time, New Republic and New Yorker didn't like either of the one act plays. Rest thought the merits of the Browning Version was enough to offset the farcical Harlequinade.

Magazine Reviewers View the New Shows -- digests on inside pages

The Closing Door-Empire, 12/1/49. Five of the reviewers on the weeklies didn't approve of Alexander Knox's melodrama starring Mr. and Mrs. Knox. Billboard's Bob Francis thought it was exciting enough to have the female customers clutching at the arms of their escorts. Others agreed that Knox, the actor, outshone Knox, the author, but they thought show was too slow for melodrama.

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Commonweal and George Jean Nathan found the Strindberg revival dull, but for different reasons. Commonweal blamed the script, Nathan blamed the actors and the director. Latter lists classic as "modern".

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Though George Jean Nathan would gladly exchange the title for a counterfeit dime, he thinks his readers may visit the Anthony Farrell musical without suffering too much.

## Moss Hart To Stage Critics' Skit

Moss Hart has agreed to stage Wolcott Gibb's critics' sketch for the ANTA Album. Sunday, January 29. Several of the critics had objected to the production of the satire of the Drama Critics Circle by the New Yorker critic. Cast members have not yet been announced.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance - see page 842 -- Cumulative Index Issued Monthly

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Checking the Ads

Giant step forward in the publication of accurate theatre advertising was made by the producers of The Closing Door. Their display ad featured a photostat of the Barnes, Herald Tribune, review of the Knox melodrama. The review was reprinted as published with nothing omitted.

Metropole

a. Times --Con-- Even with Tracy it is only moderately amusing. Under Kaufman's direction it is played on the level of a prolonged bellow that is at first deafening and then stupefying. Might play it noisily to conceal infirmities of a contrived and static script.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Con-- Script sluggish and repetitive. Real editor of New Yorker is far more fascinating and gifted than character. Tracy at top of his form. Wonder if author really did work at New Yorker.-Barnes.

c. News --Con-- My sole contact with New Yorker editor is on commuter train and Dutch Treat Club, wouldn't guess there was a play in him and I guess there isn't. Tracy performs miracles of bellowing, mugging, finger-waving. Yet comedy ever seems to be more of a private joke than a public one.-Chapman.

d. Mirror --Con-- Doubt if average playgoer is going to be familiar with characters or care overly much about them. Boils down to sometimes clever joke which is stretched tenuously over three acts. Starts like express train and ends like a tired local. Tracy brilliant, gives show many hilarious moments.-Coleman.

e. Compass --So-So-- When play is enjoying its best moments it is truly hilarious. First rate, intelligent kind of fooling. No tripe, except in plot. Play can be funny, but author can only do one funny thing at a time. Maybe next time he will be able to keep it up for an entire evening.-Pollack.

f. Post --Con-- Tracy and Kaufman both work hard, but play fails to come to life. Few comic moments are rare and far apart. Not much of a narrative.-Watts.

g. Sun --Con-- Braying, yapping, knockabout comedy that spins for two hours and gets nowhere at all. It's not long for this world. Raucous and hollow comedy, wonder why Kaufman and Gordon liked it, bought it, produced it.-Morhouse.

h. World-Telegram --Con-- Hedy Lamarr in the audience, outshined anything on stage at opening. Seems like rough first draft of what might have been good, sharp comedy. Wit is invariably labored, have active dislike for all main characters.-  
Hawkins.

i. Journal-American --Con-- Kaufman should have used blue pencil to make it funnier. Cast is good, but play does not quite come off. Although it may before long.-  
Garland.

j. Brooklyn Eagle --Con-- Even with Tracy it's still a mild to-do, labored in its attempts to be funny, good for only one or two genuine laughs. Whole production, staging and setting is drabish.-Currie.

k. Newark News --Con-- Tracy in complete charge of inept and feeble play. Tracy gets no aid from rest of cast, Kaufman's direction can't overcome scrambled and inexperienced script either.-Field.

l. Women's Wear Daily --Pro-- Approached as mere spoofing, playgoer might have enjoyable time with crazy quilt caricature, a kind of You Can't Take It With You of the magazine field. Swift in pace and pretty consistently amusing.-Dash.

### Times and Tribune Critics Differ Sharply

Atkinson, Times and Barnes, Herald Tribune, have differed sharply on six plays this season, Variety reports. This is arousing comment in Broadway theatre circles, the trade paper says, because the two papers are generally regarded as more or less in the same category and having somewhat similar type of readership.

#### Clutterback

a. Variety --Con-- Offers only moderate laughs and becomes progressively tedious. Contrived, only mildly amusing. Doubtful for N.Y. or road, can't be in films due to adultery angle, may be okay for summer stock.-Hobe.

b. Billboard --Pro-- Adds up to satisfactory three acts of frothy entertainment. More than enough of it is good fun. Credit goes to Houghton's direction. Fine interplaying by cast members, make most of every laugh.-Francis.

c. Morning Telegraph --Pro-- Highly skilled, ingratiating cast in amusing little gay play. Romp in less artful hands would have been disaster.-Bolton.

d. Women's Wear --Pro-- Hardly an important play, but will provide those who see it with pleasant evening. Sharp, observant writing and excellent characterization. Plot and some lines risqué, but never beyond bonds of good taste.-Allen.

e. Newark News --Con-- Hardly more than flippant anecdote blown up into three stanzas of small talk, some of which is practically infinitesimal.-Field.

f. Cue --Pro-- Not for the kiddies or forgetful grandma. It's for those sophisticates who know what the world was laughing about long before Columbus discovered the first Caribbean cruise. Well, don't you? Humor stays fresh, smart and tart, dialogue has highball tinkle. Actors enjoy selves, so may you.-Gabriel.

g. Newsweek --Con-- Might have made run of it in '20s. Now it's cold outside, and later than the producers think. Few observations are genuinely amusing and actors get laughs strictly on their own.

h. Time --Pro-- Has usual drawbacks of paper thin comedy, but offers a good deal more than the usual rewards. Often effervescent and funny. Good ensemble acting and direction.

i. New Yorker --Pro-- Hard to imagine a slighter plot, but thanks to unusual competence of cast and genial and civilized prose, cast manages to be almost continuously entertaining. Charmed by fact that any man would sit down and write so much about so little. Interesting characters presented.-Gibbs.

#### Checking the Ads

Display ad for That Lady quoted George Jean Nathan as writing "the play contains full-blooded heroic emotions...the romantic splendor of the passions of...kings and statesmen and princesses as opposed to the little, squeaking, psychopathic amours of the current stage." Nathan's Journal American column credited this thought to Miss Cornell, as her reason for picking the play. Nathan is positive the audience would go to see her no matter what kind of play she chose.

j. Times --Con-- Sophisticated farce by impish playwright, who is using the theatre for a lark. Even if played in swiftest, most brittle style, might not be inventive enough to fill whole evening with humorous delight. Number of empty stretches between amusing switches in plot. Actors do very well.-Atkinson.

Critics Stick to Best American Play Award

New York Drama Critics Circle voted to continue policy of picking the "best American play" and "best foreign play" of the season. Chapman, News; Atkinson, Times; Nathan, Journal-American, urged modification of the present rule to allow the critics to pick the "best play" of the season; but proposal was rejected.

Clutterbuck

a. Herald Tribune --So-So-- Follows a familiar and rather agreeable pattern. Comedy of illicit love with clever lines and a minimum of stage movement. Cast makes most of sophisticated verbal ping-pong game.--Barnes.

b. News --Pro-- Amiable, foolish and politely naughty play and performance. Reason British survived tough times is that they can get mostest from leastest. Play only enough to make few paragraphs, but spun out for happy and funny theatrical holiday.--Chapman.

c. Mirror --So-So-- Easy to see why produced, offers several hilarious episodes that had majority of first nighters howling at intervals. Despite some clever lines and Margetson's superlative performance, it doesn't quite come off.--Coleman.

d. Compass --Pro-- Those who have been clamoring for something light as air can find it now. Droll story about frivolous, amiable people, conversation deliciously witty. Actors are polite laborers struggling to create authentic fun where none appears spontaneously. Play should be much funnier, it is bright idea.--Pollock.

e. Post --Pro-- Good, old-fashioned, unashamed sex farce. Don't add to cultural stature, does prove to be rather pleasant sort of frolic. Provides Margetson with happy role. Disappointed to find slight play didn't save up for trick ending. Might have been helped by a song, but it is agreeable minor fun.--Watts.

f. Sun --Pro-- Comedy of sex, insult and nonsense, done in Noel Coward manner without sting of Coward's poisonous wit. It is slight and light, scanty and haphazard little piece. When Margetson onstage you will laugh. You'll have a good time.  
-Morchouse.

g. Journal-American --Pro-- Had a high old time, right-as-possible production with excellent cast, beautiful backgrounds, tasteful costumes and well-tempered direction. Bright and bitter nonsense with the bright side always up.--Garland.

h. World Telegram --Con-- Comedy depends on repetition and rhyme. Like all the Coward plays one doesn't want to see again. Acting so good that cannot help wishing the play itself was better.--Hawkins.

i. Brooklyn Eagle --So-So-- No Merry Wives of Windsor, but its comedy does provoke laughter. It is brash, saucy, and now and then, hilarious. It is also pedestrian in spots. Steamer chair talk isn't always funny, even in a farce.--Currie.

Garland's TV Play Fanned

Chevrolet Tele-Theatre's production of Robert Garland's "At Night All Cats Are Gray" didn't rate a "pro" review from Variety's television reporter. Calling it a "deliberately artificial comedy that didn't have sufficient wit to carry it off", Variety pointed out that this again proves that someone who can tell the difference between a good and a bad egg doesn't have to know how to lay one.



# The Father

a. Commonweal --Con-- A very dull deal indeed, Off Broadway production was much better. Amount of illogic, fake science and nonsense in script is not startling enough to keep the piece in the foreground of attention.-Phelan.

b. George Jean Nathan --Con-- In spite of what colleagues say play is modern and superior to the numerous ones it has inspired. But the stage direction and performance of this production is dated. Only Noel Coward or Zora Mostel in lead, could be worse miscasting. Christians still playing "Mama" with alternating overtones of Theda Bara and Mae West.

# Texas Li'l Darlin'

c. George Jean Nathan --Pro-- Offers some intermittent mild diversion and may be visited without too much suffering, maybe. Delmar character and gags are straight out of a number of comedy political films. Several of tunes are catchy, some fresher amusing moments, some energetic hoofing.

# The Closing Door

d. Variety --Con-- Undeniably tense moment, but suspense is not sustained, too much esoteric palaver. Knox wrote self showy part, some of lengthy speeches defeat him. Direction fails to give pace to slow passages.-Hobbs.

e. Billboard --Pro-- Despite some heavy-handed direction, and a few moments of pure hokum, it unveils as suspenseful chiller which will set fcm pew buyers to clawing at their escorts' arms. Knox written self a really helluva part, over all excellent supporting cast.-Francis.

f. Cue --Con-- Maybe is played for out-and-out spine-chiller, it might have been at least some icicle point to it. Maybe if direction didn't hang such a heavy air of hospital pain upon every semi-thrill. Maybe...-Gabriel.

g. Time --Con-- Gruesomeness that frays the nerves rather than tingles the spine. Not particularly boring, it's just not much fun. Actor Knox with his low-keyed, believable performance proves playwright Knox's strongest ally.

h. Newsweek --Con-- More tedious than exciting. Major trouble is that Knox written self fat role too rich in moods and speeches. The character is inflated at the melodrama's expense.

i. New Yorker --Con-- One belated moment of ghastliness is too little and too late (came at 10:27 PM). Knox the actor more successful than Knox the author. Nolan's role struck me as making little or no sense.-Gibbs.

# Key To N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer didn't state his preference directly.

1. NY Times	11. Newark News	21. Catholic World
2. NY Herald Tribune	12. Women's Wear Daily	22. Commonweal
3. NY News	13. Daily Worker	23. Cue
4. NY Mirror	14. Wall St. Journal	24. Ch. Sci. Monitor
5. NY Compass (Star, PM)	15. Journal of Commerce	25. Sat. Review Lit.
6. NY Post	16. George J. Nathan	26. Newsweek
7. NY Sun	17. Morning Telegraph	27. Time
8. NY Journal American	18. Variety	28. Nation
9. NY World Telegram	19. Billboard	29. New Republic
10. Brooklyn Eagle	20. Theatre Arts	30. New Yorker

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 841 for key

A Streetcar Named Desire-Barrymore, 12/3/47. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-28-29-30. Con: 13-21-24. So-So: 16-27.

As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48. Pro: 1-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-15-16-18-19-23-26-27-29-30. Con: 2-5-17-22. So-So: 3-9-20-21.

Born Yesterday-Miller, 2/1/46. All 30 critics voted Pro.

Death Of A Salesman-Moresco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: Nation. So-So: Time

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-27-30.

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49. 30 reviews for Mac. 30 reviews against her play.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 1-5-22-27-30.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: New Republic. So-So: No review in Nation.

Lend An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-26-27-30. Con: 5-13-29. So-So: 14-28.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-26-27-30. Con: 5-13-29. So-So: 14-28.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-18-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-18-19-20-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 2-15-17.

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Pro: 3-5-6-8-9-11-12-13-22-27. Con: 1-4-7-10-14-16-18-19-23-24-25-26-28-30. So-So: 2-15-17.

Regina-46th Street Theatre, 10/31/49. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-9-11-12-14-17-18-22-24-26-27-30. Con: 2-3-10-15-16-19-25-28. So-So: 1-23.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-30. So-So: 24-27.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 6-9-12-14-15-17. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-23-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-26-27.

That Lady-Boek, 11/22/49. Pro: 1-9-10-11-19. Con: 2-3-5-6-8-12-14-16-17-18-23-26-27-28-30. So-So: 4-7.

The Closing Door-Empire, 12/1/49. Pro: 2-9-10-11. Con: 1-3-4-6-12. So-So: 5-7-8.

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Pro: 3-10-11-17-23-26. Con: 2-4-5-7-8-9-12-13-14-15-19-24-27-30. So-So: 1-18-28.

The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48. Pro: 1-2-3-5-11-12-13-14-18-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 4-6-7-8-15-16-19-28. So-So: 9-10.

Touch And Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-20-22. So-So: 8-10-29.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-8-9-11-14-15-17-18-20-21-23-29-30. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

Yes, M'Lord-Booth, 10/4/49. Pro: 2-3-5-6-7-9-11-14-15-17-19-22-26-30. Con: 1-4-8-13-23-26. So-So: 10-12-16.

